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## Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies

### Edited Book

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# Introduction

## Understanding ‘Migrant Capital’

*Louise Ryan, Umut Erel and Alessio D’Angelo*

Migration studies have widely adopted the concept of ‘social networks’ (Boyd, 1989; Castle and Miller, 2003; Jordan and Duvell, 2003; Faist and Ozveren, 2004), usually closely linked to that of ‘social capital’ and, more generally, to capital theory. Social networks are widely recognised as a key source of migrants’ capital, facilitating migration and settlement as well as the maintenance of transnational lives (Portes, 1995; Castles and Miller, 2003; Faist and Ozveren, 2004). Migrant and ethnic networks can also constitute ‘communities of resistance’ (Sivanandan, 1990) against exclusion and discrimination.

Nonetheless, among migration researchers the concept of ‘networks’ has often been employed loosely (Wierzbicki, 2004); at the same time, the relationship between networks and capital has often been taken for granted (Anthias, 2007) rather than being properly analysed and discussed. Indeed, social capital theory has often overlooked the role of mobility, migration and ethnicity (see Erel, 2010 and Goulbourne et al., 2010). More analysis is needed of the processes through which migrants develop, access and maintain different types of networks in different social locations, with different people and of how such networks are used to generate, transfer and activate resources (Ryan et al., 2008; Eve, 2010; Ryan, 2011). Drawing on capital theories and network analysis, as well as a range of empirical data, this book contributes to a complex and nuanced understanding of migrant networks and how these link to varied forms of capital.

*Migrant Capital* covers a broad range of case studies and, by bringing together leading and emerging researchers, presents state-of-the-art empirical, theoretical and methodological perspectives on migration, networks, social and cultural capital, exploring ways in which these bodies of literature can inform and strengthen each other. In so doing, we

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bring the theoretical and methodological dimensions into dialogue with each other.

The migrants discussed in the book are ethnically and socio-economically diverse and have a range of migratory trajectories and experiences. Various types of networks are looked at and compared: intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic; locally based, national and transnational; informal and formal, including migrant community organisations. The book is international in focus drawing on research from Australia, North America, the Caribbean and across Europe, including Italy, Spain, Austria, Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom. Research has often focused on individual cases, thereby running the risk of over-emphasising the peculiarities of certain migrant groups and locations, leading to criticisms of empirical nationalism (Amelina and Faist, 2012; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). The range of case studies in this book can open up a comparative perspective to contribute to a broader theoretical framework rooted in empirical research.

The overall aim of this book is to explore why, how and with whom migrants form networks and interrogate the extent to which social, economic and cultural capital are generated within these social ties. However, it goes beyond simple description. By critically engaging with current academic and policy debates, the book explores networks and capital in all their complexity to analyse how:

- social networks both shape and are shaped by migrant mobilities through space and time;
- networking processes emerge from the interaction of identities, shared needs, individuals' strategies and opportunity structures within the host society;
- migrants use networks to transfer, generate and activate social, economic and cultural capital, often to gain or challenge nationally bounded forms of recognition;
- migrants' social, economic and cultural capital are both stratified and stratifying within and across gender, class, ethnicity and migration status;
- individual and collective dimensions of accruing social, economic and cultural capital interrelate;
- social networks are often characterised by a complex balance between solidarity and exploitation, trust and conflict.

All these issues raise questions about how social networks are conceptualised and what research methodologies are useful in understanding them; these are discussed in the following sections.

## Exploring migrants' networks

The significance of social networks in migration has been discussed by numerous scholars over many decades (Hugo, 1982; Massey, 1988; Boyd, 1989; Gurak and Caces, 1992; Portes, 1995; Castles and Miller, 2003; Faist and Ozveren, 2004; Heering et al., 2004; Olwig, 2007; Haug, 2008). However, there is a tendency within migration studies to simply take ethnic networks for granted, with – as noted by several commentators (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Ryan, 2007; Eve, 2010) – fairly limited analysis of how such networks are formed. In particular, Eve suggests that the concentration of ethnic ties cannot be simply assumed as natural, but should stimulate enquiry into their roots so that we can develop a 'sociological explanation of particularities and an account of how they emerge from preceding ties' (2010: 1245).

The work of Bourdieu reveals that the existence of a network of connections is not a given, rather it is 'the product of endless effort' required 'in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits' (1986: 52). Moreover, people's opportunities to access and participate in networks depend on the available time and resources. As we will discuss below, such resources are stratified according to class, gender, ethnicity and other social divisions. Furthermore, as noted by Anthias (2007), even where people participate in a network, they may not all be able to derive equal benefits. Thus, the assumption that migrants are able to access dense networks within close-knit local communities 'simplifies the experiences of newly arrived migrants, underestimating difficulties they may face in accessing support' (Ryan et al., 2008) and the distrust or exclusion they may face from the resident population. This issue will be explored in detail in several chapters in this book, for example, by Patulny, drawing on his recent research in Australia, and by Cederberg in relation to Sweden.

More generally, in this book we suggest that several of the assumptions about networking made by seminal scholars cannot be easily applied to migrants. For example, while Putnam and Coleman focus on the stability of social relationships, 'it is the dynamism of networks that is particularly relevant to the study of migrants' social ties' (Ryan et al., 2008: 675). Migrant networks change as needs and circumstances alter over time and over the life course (cf. Ryan and Mulholland, this volume). Likewise, while Putnam and Coleman are primarily concerned with local associations, communities and neighbourhoods, migrant networks are often dispersed over a wide geographical area, as chapters by Reynolds, Keles and Molina et al. demonstrate; migrants' social ties may expand beyond the nation state

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to encompass transnational relationships (see also Dahinden, 2007). In particular, Reynolds's chapter building upon her earlier, influential work on transnational kinship ties (2007, 2008) assesses care exchanged in these networks as resources for building capital, while Keles offers insights into resources generated through Internet-based networks.

Yet, it is also necessary to consider how propinquity remains important for certain kinds of support, such as childcare (Ryan, 2007; Ryan et al., 2008). Although migrants may sometimes call in support through transnational networks, this will usually require physical relocation at least on a temporary basis (Ryan et al., 2008; Isaksen, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to consider the ways in which local and translocal networks may affect and shape each other. In their study of a specific neighbourhood in Spain, Molina et al. (this volume) use social network analysis to explore how local and transnational networks interact. In their chapter, Schnell et al. explore the formation of local ties among migrants in different types of neighbourhoods across Vienna. Barriers to accessing local networks, even for migrants rich in social and economic capital, are discussed in Ryan and Mulholland's chapter.

Overall the chapters in this book demonstrate that the study of social networks among migrants – even more than with other groups – requires the differentiation of networks both temporally and spatially. More specifically, *Migrant Capital* explores how social networks both shape and are shaped by migrant mobilities through space and time – an approach requiring rigorous conceptualisation of networks. In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we critically engage with how networks are conceptualised, with a particular focus on the bonding and bridging dichotomy; next we consider the relationship between networks and capital and then we discuss the complex interconnections between networks and the intersections of ethnicity, gender and class. Finally, we explore methodological approaches to the study of networks and consider the advantages of mixed methods in social networks analysis.

### **Re-visiting bridging and bonding capital**

Putnam's (2000) distinction between *bonding* – 'ties to people who are like me in some important way' – and *bridging* – ties to 'people who are unlike me in some important way' – has been particularly influential within migration studies (see for example, Nannestad et al., 2008; Fernandez and Nichols, 2002). There has been a tendency to associate bridging networks to 'positive' forms of social capital, leading to

integration and social mobility of migrants, with positive effects on wider society (Coffé and Geys, 2008: 358; Nannestad et al., 2008). On the other hand, bonding networks tend to be widely regarded as 'negative' social capital, leading to closed ethnic enclaves threatening overall social cohesion (Marshall and Stolle, 2004; Anthias, 2007; Hickman et al., 2012). Research over many decades has illustrated that migrants who rely heavily on ethnic-specific networks for jobs, housing and practical support may become encapsulated within migrant enclaves which can reinforce social marginalisation (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Woolcock, 1998; Griffiths et al., 2005).

As Kelly and Lusi (2006: 842) argue, 'although migration studies often celebrate the use of networks in the integration of new immigrants, this utilisation should perhaps more accurately be interpreted as an indication of how comparatively bereft of social contacts, and the value they provide, immigrants really are'. Dense, ethnic-specific networks may be characterised as 'truncated' (Portes, 1998); while protecting disadvantaged groups from discrimination and abuse, they may cut off some members from information about the wider society. In relation to migrant organisations, some authors (Taylor, 2003; Crow, 2004) have pointed out the risk that they can reinforce social division and even segregation, and create a condition of dependency to access services and exercise rights (D'Angelo, 2008). This book highlights the complex combination of solidarity and exploitation, trust and conflict within migrant and ethnic-specific networks (see for example chapters by D'Angelo, Erel, Herman and Jacobs and Molina et al.).

The concepts of 'bonding' and 'bridging' are often used in a rather simplistic, dichotomous fashion within migration studies and should be disentangled. As Patulny has argued in his influential work (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007) – and further develops in this book – bonding and bridging are not mutually exclusive concepts but located along a continuum of social relationships. This raises further questions about the meaning of 'bonding' and 'bridging' (Geys and Murdoch, 2010; Ryan, 2011). Rather than following Putnam and differentiating bonding and bridging primarily on the basis of the similarity or dissimilarity of the people involved, a case has been made for focusing instead on the meaning as well as the structure of networks – that is, on the specific relationship between the actors, their relative social location and their available and realisable resources (Ryan, 2011; Ryan and Mulholland, 2014a). For example, bonding may involve close, durable relationships resulting in shared resources of social and emotional support, while bridging may involve more expansive but less intimate



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relationships resulting in flows of valuable information. This relates to Mark Granovetter's early conceptualisation of 'bridging' capital in 'weak ties' (1973), providing people 'with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle'. This is echoed by Bourdieu (1986) when arguing that social ties are most effective when they result in access to those who have more resources and knowledge.

The concept of social location in relation to social capital theory indicates the need to differentiate between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' weak ties. Drawing on Granovetter's and Bourdieu's concepts of 'social location'/'social distance', networks can be conceptualised in terms of the value of resources travelling across 'horizontal' and 'vertical' bridges (Ryan, 2011). Studies from different countries suggest that migrants with high levels of bonding networks may also have high levels of bridging (Nannestad et al., 2008). This observation raises interesting questions about networking strategies. It is often assumed that poor and socially disadvantaged migrants rely on dense, multiplex, intra-ethnic bonds, while the highly skilled are perceived to be less reliant on such networks (Vertovec, 2001a; Wierzbicki, 2004). In their chapter, Ryan and Mulholland explore this issue in relation to highly skilled migrants and examine the cultural capital that may enable social actors to forge new relationships, both vertically and horizontally in the host environment.

Networks do not operate in a vacuum, and it is important to consider how networking processes emerge from the interaction of identities, shared needs, individuals' strategies and wider social structures. For example, Herman and Jacobs' and D'Angelo's chapters examine how the political-opportunity structures of the host society may shape migrant associational formations. Caponio's chapter on migrant domestic workers explores their uses of networks to gain residence and citizenship status in Italy, while Cederberg's chapter examines the strategies and resources that migrants mobilise in their efforts to establish themselves professionally and socially in Sweden. In the Austrian context, Schnell et al. analyse how migrants negotiate belonging through local attachments. Drawing on the Canadian experience, Deeb and Bauder examine how migrants negotiate integration into the workplace to achieve 'success'. These discussions of opportunities and obstacles go beyond a narrow, simplistic and dichotomous interpretation of networks as either bonding (intra-ethnic) or bridging (inter-ethnic). Instead they examine the complexity and diversity of migrant ties along a wide spectrum of relationships with different people in different places. By adopting this approach, we argue, the nuances of the connections between social networks and social capital can be better understood.

## **Linking networks and social capital**

As Portes suggested, 'the term social capital has become one of the most popular exports from sociological theory into everyday language', emerging as a 'cure-all for the maladies affecting society' (1998: 2). Especially during the 2000s, national, transnational and global policymaking promoted the idea that social capital could mitigate social inequality (Putnam, 2007). In relation to migration in particular, social capital has often been identified by policymakers as a key resource to promote migrants' social inclusion and social cohesion (Dwyer et al., 2006). Some authors have criticised the lack of conceptual clarity and ubiquitous use of the term 'social capital', rendering it almost meaningless (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Fine, 2010). Yet, there are very different conceptualisations of social capital in circulation.

The pioneering work of Coleman (1988) focused particularly on the social capital realisable through relationships of mutual trust and obligation within closed, multiplex networks. Coleman's work is useful in elucidating the nature of resources within different networks and the extent to which they are made available because of norms governing expectations of obligation and support. However, while Coleman regarded closed bonds as positive sources of social capital, other researchers have highlighted the negative aspects of such exclusivity (Edwards, 2004). The tension between inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of social capital is discussed in more detail by several contributors to this book (see Molina et al., Herman and Jacobs, Keles, D'Angelo, Erel).

Bourdieu has presented a more critical perspective on social capital as one of three forms of capital – together with economic and cultural – that individuals may possess, thus offering a more differentiated understanding of how capital is accessed and accumulated. In this sense, while economic capital refers to material assets and income, cultural capital refers to the symbolic assets which may be embodied in accent and behaviour – 'the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 49) – which may also be institutionalised through education. On the other hand, social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words to membership in a group'.

Although seminal authors such as Coleman, Bourdieu and Putnam pay little attention to migrants, a growing number of migration scholars have begun to explore the impact and usefulness of social capital for migrant communities (see Heering et al., 2004; Evergeti and Zontini,

2006; Anthias, 2007; Goulbourne et al., 2010). Haug (2008), in particular, argues that the concept of social capital provides an important tool for understanding how networks affect migration.

The way and the extent to which these concepts have been used lead Fine to criticise migration studies for jumping on 'the social capital bandwagon' (2010: 186). Indeed there has been a tendency in the literature not only to use the concept in generalised ways but also to confuse the sources of social capital – that is, access to networks – with the resources thus derived, for example, economic benefits (for a discussion see Woolcock, 1998; Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Edwards et al., 2003; Reimer et al., 2008). Floya Anthias (2007) has criticised the tendency to treat ethnic networks and ties simply as evidence of social capital:

While ethnic ties may provide resources relating to sociality and commonality, which may indirectly feed into aspects of life that enable people to achieve improved life chances, they do not always function directly as forms of social capital that can be drawn on for social advantage in direct ways.

(Anthias, 2007: 788)

*Migrant Capital* contributes to discussions about how social capital can be understood. Several chapters develop a critical interrogation of the power relations, hierarchies and exclusionary mechanisms of migrant social and cultural capital. Drawing on empirical data from Sweden, Cederberg argues that refugees' and migrants' access to particular forms of social capital may be negotiated through constructions of embodied features of sameness or difference. Erel shows how hegemonic notions of femininity can work to exclude women from particular migrant networks and the resources generated in them. Focusing on Australia, Patulny examines how refugees and other migrants have differential access to social capital through their networks. Keles shows how age, gender, education and linguistic skills can create hierarchies in migrants' access to virtual and face-to-face networks, affecting their access to symbolic and economic capital.

The value of the resources may also vary greatly between networks. For example, closed networks, which are rich in resources may be valuable to members, while closed networks which are low in resources but high on expectations of support may reinforce disadvantage and inhibit social mobility. In chapters by Molina et al. and Reynolds, this discussion is further developed to consider how issues of trust and solidarity

offer potential benefits but are also sources of possible exploitation within ethnic-specific migrant networks. Thus, the precise nature of the resources available and realisable within networks is also of crucial importance. Throughout this book we argue that, to be useful, the notion of social capital needs to be specific about relationships between actors, their relative social location and the actual resources available and realisable within particular social networks (see Ryan, 2011).

In *Migrant Capital*, we bring together perspectives on social capital at individual, collective, organisational, national and transnational level – exploring the interconnections between these. Recent years have seen a growing interest in the role of migrant and ethnic community organisations (Moya, 2005; Schrover and Vermeulen, 2005). As noted by Jacobs (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004) and developed in his chapter, with Herman, in this book, the role of migrant organisations has been strongly linked to the notions of migrants' social networks and social capital, since it is often thought that 'the vibrancy of associational life ( . . . ) is positively correlated with the stocks of social capital a society possesses' (Maloney et al., 2000: 212). This raises the question of the relationship between individuals and collectives as bearers of capital. Herman and Jacobs discuss whether membership in different types of organisations, including intra- and inter-ethnic ones, may have a varying impact on migrants' political involvement. D'Angelo's chapter focuses on the networking among organisations and how this is shaped by shared identities, common aims, but also competition and conflict. Finally Keles's chapter looks at the interrelationship between virtual (online) and offline networks and investigates how these function as a social capital resource for community building.

## Considering the role of ethnicity, gender and class

In examining power differentials and unequal access to resources, it is also necessary to unpack the notion of ethnicity in migrant networks and assess how the intersections of ethnicity, class and gender, in particular, may impact on migrants' opportunities to build networks and generate different forms of capital. Although within the literature there is often an assumption that networks are based on shared ethnicity, this cannot be taken for granted. As Keles' and D'Angelo's chapters on Kurds show, migrants from the same country may be part of different ethnic groups (i.e. Turks and Kurds). On the other hand, co-ethnic migrants, such as Kurds, may come from different countries (e.g. Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria). This may affect how migrants build networks. Moreover, we

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should not neglect the fact that some migrants' networks, especially in the country of settlement, are with people of other ethnicities, as discussed in several chapters including by Deeb and Bauder, Caponio and also Patulny.

In conceptualising the links between networks and capital, this book highlights the different dimensions in which people – and migrants in particular – may be 'alike and unlike in important ways' – to paraphrase Putnam. There has been a tendency to focus on bridging ties exclusively in relation to ethnicity; however the idea of 'ethnic identity' as neat, clear-cut and unproblematic is somewhat inadequate to analyse migrants' interpersonal attachments and social networking. Thus, network research needs to take into account that ethnicity is constructed situationally, often in response to opportunity structures within the society of residence, as elaborated in the chapters by Caponio, D'Angelo, Schnell et al. and Herman and Jacobs.

Many migrants feel they belong to several communities simultaneously; Anthias (2000, 2002) suggests that to address multilayered complex belongings, researchers should replace the notion of 'identity' with that of 'narratives of location and positionality'. Such an approach would enable the researcher 'to understand the ways in which the narrator, at a specific point in time and space, is able to make sense of and articulate their placement in the social order of things. This, however, also means the recognition of the narrative as an action, as a performance' (Anthias, 2002: 501). Moreover, in certain contexts other aspects of identity, such as class and gender, may be as – if not more – important than ethnicity or migrant background. Complex, multilayered and performative aspects of belonging are thematised in the chapters by Erel, Reynolds, D'Angelo, Keles and Cederberg. Some of this book's authors (e.g. Erel, 2009; Ryan, 2011) have pointed out how migrants may build networks based on a number of similarities, such as gender, shared parenting, shared political projects and attachment to locality – not only ethnicity; this is further explored in several chapters. Erel's chapter, in particular, focuses on how the intersections of gender and class affect the ability to form and validate social and cultural capital for women in migration. The chapter shows that different articulations of femininity and class can lead both to vulnerabilities and exclusion of women from some ethnically based networks. In turn, this can motivate migrant women to build alternative sources of social and cultural capital.

Gender plays a key role in migrants' networking strategies (Kofman et al., 2000; Ryan, 2007; Erel, 2010). Although most classic theorists of social capital either ignore women completely or else take for granted

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